Singers in the Dawn

A Brief Anthology of American Negro Poetry

Compiled by
ROBERT B. ELEAZER

Published by
CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND RACE RELATIONS
710 Standard Building
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Foreword

A few decades ago the map of the world which we studied in school still showed great uncharted areas marked "unknown." A recent examination of thirty-eight volumes on American literature—textbooks and anthologies—revealed a similar unexplored area of literary attainment. In most of these books this region was not even marked unknown—it was simply ignored, as if it were not there at all.

Yet, even a hurried adventure into that area reveals a unique and interesting realm of literary art, and suggests rich possibilities as yet unrealized. To introduce the inquiring student to this new land, which is the purpose of this little volume, is a service he will appreciate increasingly as he explores further.

The compiler makes no pretense of original research or critical authority. He cheerfully confesses his debt to the three or four anthologies covering this field, notably "Negro Poets and Their Poems" by Thomas A. Kerlin, "An Anthology of Verse by American Negroes" by White and Jackson, "The Book of American Negro Poetry" by James Weldon Johnson, and "Caroling Dusk" by Countee Cullen. Each of these collections is an excellent piece of work; any or all of them are recommended to those wishing to go further into the subject. For authority to quote, we are indebted to Dodd, Mead and Company, Harper and Brothers, and Harcourt, Brace and Company.

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SINGERS IN THE DAWN

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

At eight years of age an African-born slave girl on the auction block in Boston; at twenty acclaimed on two continents as among America's most talented poets—such, in brief, is the story of Phillis Wheatley, in point of time the second American Negro poet,* and the first of major consequence.

Brought over and offered for sale with a cargo of slaves in 1761, the little African girl attracted the attention of the wealthy John Wheatley, of Boston, who bought her as a present for his wife. Mrs. Wheatley, a benevolent woman, noted the girl's quick mind and determined to give her a chance. Twelve years later, Phillis published a 124-page volume containing thirty-nine "Poems on Various Subjects,"† with an introduction by the governor and other prominent people of Massachusetts. About the same time she paid a visit to England, where she was entertained by Lady Huntington and read her verses before members of the royal family.

In response to her poem in his honor, General Washington wrote her a letter commending her "poetic talents" and "elegant lines" and inviting her to call at his headquarters, where, it is said, she was received "with marked courtesy" by Washington and his officers.

Phillis Wheatley's work was in the traditional style of the eighteenth century, and is ranked as among the "best American echoes of the English classicists."‡ The following quotation from the poem "Imagination" illustrates very well both her own imaginative gift and her command of language in which to clothe it fittingly:

> Imagination! who can sing thy force?
> Or who describe the swiftness of thy course?
> Soaring through air to find the bright abode,
> Th' empyreal palace of the thundering God,
> We on thy pinions can surpass the wind,
> And leave the rolling universe behind.
> From star to star the mental optics rove,
> Measure the skies and range the realms above;
> There in one view we grasp the mighty whole,
> Or with new worlds amaze th' unbounded soul.

The ward of a wealthy and benevolent family, given every opportunity for culture and self-expression, it is not surprising that Phillis Wheatley took the optimistic view of her condition expressed in the poem "On Being Brought From Africa to America":

> 'Twas mercy brought me from my pagan land,
> Taught my benighted soul to understand
> That there's a God and there's a Saviour too;
> Once I redemption neither sought nor knew.
> Some view our sable race with scornful eye—
> "Their color is a diabolic dye."
> Remember, Christians, Negroes black as Cain,
> May be refined, and join th' angelic train.

---

* Jupiter Hammon preceded Phillis Wheatley by a few years, with his "Evening Thought" and other religious poems published in the seventeen-hundred-sixties.
† "A surprisingly good collection."—Knight, American Literature and Culture (1932).
‡ Abernathy—"American Literature" (1902).

A HUNDRED NEGRO POETS SINCE WHEATLEY

Phillis Wheatley's work begins an interesting story of Africa's contribution to American literature.* Handicapped as the race has been—and is—by slavery and its consequences, nevertheless more than a hundred American Negroes have published volumes of verse, most of it pleasing and some of it of a very high order. After Phillis Wheatley, the next well-known name in the list is that of Paul Laurence Dunbar, who came on the scene a hundred years later. In the intervening century, however, there appeared a number of minor Negro poets who at least deserve mention.

A RHYMING JANITOR

George Moses Horton, a slave employed as janitor at the University of North Carolina in the eighteen hundred-twenties, used to write love letters and verses for the students. In 1829, his white friends published a little volume of his poems called "The Hope of Liberty," which they vainly tried to sell for enough to buy his freedom. These stanzas are characteristic:

Alas! and am I born for this,
To wear this slavish chain?
Deprived of all created bliss,
Through hardship, toil, and pain?

Come, Liberty! thou cheerful sound,
Roll through my ravished ears;
Come, let my grief in joys be drowned,
And drive away my fears.

Frances Watkins Harper, a contemporary of Horton, is said to have "attained greater popularity than any poet of her race prior to Dunbar."† Some of Mrs. Harper's poems circulated to the number of 10,000 copies. Her first volume was published in 1854. Though fired, like Horton, with the desire for liberty, her spirit was serene and gentle, her work sincere, and her style fluent and "not without poetic phrasing."

Thus she expressed her longing for freedom:

Make me a grave wher'er you will,
In a lowly plain or a lofty hill;
Make it among earth's humblest graves,
But not in a land where men are slaves.

Thus she welcomed emancipation, which came in her lifetime:

It shall flash through coming ages,
It shall light the distant years;
And eyes now dim with sorrow
Shall be brighter through their tears.

Ann Plato, of Hartford, Connecticut, published a book of twenty poems in 1841; *Charles L. Reason* brought out "Freedom" in 1847; *James Madison Bell,* fervid anti-slavery orator, published "The Progress of Liberty" a little later; and *A. A. Whitman* brought out in 1877 a 250-page volume of verse. Lack of space forbids quotations.

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* "The Negro in American literature has become well worth investigation by the student who desires entertainment and the pursuit of something unique in the field of art."—Rankin, "American Literature."

† Robert T. Kerlin, "Negro Poets and Their Poems," 1923.

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

"He came, a dark youth, singing in the dawn
Of a new freedom, glowing o'er his lyre,
Refining, as with great Apollo's fire,
His people's gift of song."

Thus James D. Corrothers, contemporary Negro poet, hailed the advent of *Paul Laurence Dunbar,* best known of all American Negro writers of verse. Dunbar, according to James Weldon Johnson, "stands out as the first poet from the Negro race in the United States to show a combined mastery over poetic material and poetic technique, to reveal innate literary distinction in what he wrote, and to maintain a high level of performance."†

Born June 27th, 1872, in Dayton, Ohio, of poor parents formerly slaves, Paul Dunbar began writing verse in his grammar school days, edited his school paper, graduated from high school in 1891, and published his first volume of poems, "Oak and Ivy," two years later at the age of twenty-one. His second book, "Majors and Minors," published in 1895, attracted the attention of William Dean Howells, who gave it a favorable review. This introduced Dunbar to the literary world. His third volume, "Lyrics of Lowly Life," with an introduction by Howells, won the author national recognition. This was followed by four other volumes from 1896 to 1905. His collected poems were brought out in 1918.

Though Dunbar was never robust and died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty-four, he still takes first rank, perhaps first place, among American Negro poets. While best known for his poems in Negro dialect (a medium which he often employed because of its popular appeal), much of his work, perhaps the best of it, is in conventional English. The few brief selections which follow, while typical, give but a faint suggestion of the richness and variety of Dunbar's work, which comprises more than four hundred poems.*

THE MASTER PLAYER

An old, worn harp that had been played
Till all its strings were loose and frayed,
Joy, Hate, and Fear, each one essayed
To play. But each in turn had found
No sweet responsiveness of sound.

Then Love, the Master Player, came,
With heaving breast and eyes aflame;
The Harp he took all undismayed,
Smote on its strings, still strange to song,
And brought forth music sweet and strong.

FROM "ODE TO ETHIOPIA"

No other race, or white or black,
When bound as thou wert to the rack,
So seldom stooped to grieving;
No other race, when free again,
Forgot the past and proved them men
So noble in forgiving.

† "The Book of American Negro Poetry."

* Quotations are from "Complete Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar," by permission of the publishers, Dodd, Mead & Co., Inc.

Thou hast the right to noble pride,
Whose spotless robes were purified
By blood's severe baptism.
Upon thy brow the cross was laid,
And labor's painful sweat-beads made
A consecrating chrism.

LIFE

A crust of bread and a corner to sleep in,
A minute to smile and an hour to weep in,
A pint of joy to a peck of trouble,
And never a laugh but the moans come double:
And that is life!

A crust and a corner that love makes precious,
With the smile to warm and the tears to refresh us;
And joy seems sweeter when cares come after,
And a moan is the finest of foils for laughter:
And that is life!

LESSER LIGHTS

Contemporary with and immediately following Dunbar, the admitted poet laureate of the race, came a long line of lesser lights for whom bare mention and an occasional brief quotation must suffice:

Joseph S. Cotter, born at Bardstown, Ky., Feb. 2, 1861, quit school after the third grade; was laborer, factory hand and teamster until twenty-two; ambitious night school student for two terms; then school teacher, and finally high school principal in Louisville. Writer of verse and folk stories and author of several books. Father of the brilliant but short-lived young poet, Joseph Cotter, Jr.

James D. Corrothers, born in Cass County, Michigan, 1869, was early rendered homeless and thrown on his own resources; in youth a wanderer working in lumber camps and sawmills, and as sailor, coachman, janitor and bootblack. Was encouraged to get an education by friends, among them Frances E. Willard, who made it possible for him to go to college. Entered the ministry and continued for life in that profession. His first poems appeared in Century Magazine and attracted wide attention. Published two volumes of verse, "Selected Poems" (1907), and "The Dream and the Song" (1914). Is best known by the following poem, a moving picture of the struggle of his race to preserve its soul from bitterness and hate:

AT THE CLOSED GATE OF JUSTICE

To be a Negro in a day like this
Demands forgiveness. Bruised with blow on blow,
Betrayed, like him whose woe dimmed eyes gave bliss,
Still must one succor those who brought one low,
To be a Negro in a day like this.

To be a Negro in a day like this
Demands rare patience—patience that can wait
In utter darkness. 'Tis the path to miss,
And knock, unheeded, at an iron gate,
To be a Negro in a day like this.

To be a Negro in a day like this
  Demands strange loyalty. We serve a flag
Which is to us white freedom's emphasis.
  Ah! one must love when Truth and Justice lag,
To be a Negro in a day like this.

To be a Negro in a day like this—
  Alas! Lord God, what evil have we done?
Still shines the gate, all gold and amethyst,
  But I pass by, the glorious goal unwon,
"Merely a Negro"—in a day like this!

Daniel W. Davis, born in North Carolina, 1862, finished high school with honor in Richmond, taught five years in the Richmond schools, then entered the ministry. Wrote the "Exposition Ode" for the opening of the Negro building at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895. His collected poems were published in 1897 in a volume entitled "'Weh Down Souf'."

James Edwin Campbell, born in the early sixties in Pomeroy, Ohio, was educated in public schools and Miami College. Wrote for Chicago daily papers and for the "Four O'Clock Magazine." Was the first Negro poet to write in dialect. Published a volume entitled "Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere."

William H. A. Moore, of New York City, was educated in the public schools and City College; had a long career in newspaper work; is the author of "Dusk Songs," a volume of poems.

George M. McClellan, born at Belfast, Tenn., 1860, was educated at Fisk University and Hartford Theological Seminary. "A gentle poet of nature, of the seasons, of birds and flowers and woodland scenes."* A collection of his verse, "The Path of Dreams," was published in 1916. His poem, "The Feet of Judas," evidences a great soul and a sound philosophy. Three of the five stanzas are quoted:

THE FEET OF JUDAS

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
The dark and evil passions of his soul,
His secret plot, and sordidness complete,
His hate, his purposing, Christ knew the whole,
And still in love he stooped and washed his feet.

Christ washed the feet of Judas!
And thus a girded servant, self-abased,
Taught that no wrong this side the gate of heaven
Was ever too great to wholly be effaced,
And though unasked, in spirit be forgiven.

And so if we have ever felt the wrong
Of trampled rights, of caste, it matters not,
Whate'er the soul has felt or suffered long,
Oh, heart! this one thing should not be forgot:
Christ washed the feet of Judas.

---

* James Weldon Johnson, "The Book of American Negro Poetry."

W. E. B. DUBOIS

William E. Burghardt DuBois, born at Great Barrington, Mass., 1868, was educated in the public schools, Fisk University (A.B.), Harvard (A.M. and Ph.D.), and University of Berlin. Teacher at Wilberforce and Atlanta Universities. His famous book, "The Souls of Black Folk," ranks with the best American literature. Much of DuBois' prose is essentially poetic. His one great prose poem, "A Litany of Atlanta," "Done in the Day of Death, 1906," was wrung from his soul by the horrors of a race riot in which nearly a score of people, most of them innocent, were killed and wounded. There is hardly a more powerful piece of writing in American literature; no student of English can afford to overlook it. A few quotations must suffice. This graphic picture of the riot itself:

> Red was the midnight; clang, crack and cry of death and fury filled the air and trembled underneath the stars when church spires pointed silently to Thee. And all this was to sate the greed of greedy men who hide behind the veil of vengeance! Bend us Thine ear, O Lord! . . .

This of one of the victims:

> Behold this maimed and broken thing; dear God, it was an humble black man who toiled and sweat to save a bit from the pittance paid him. They told him: "Work and rise." He worked. Did this man sin? Nay, but someone told how someone said another did—one whom he had never seen nor known. Yet for that man's crime this man lieth maimed and murdered, his wife naked to shame, his children, to poverty and evil. . . .

Finally, this agonized cry for light and leading for his race:

> Bewildered we are, and passion-tost, mad with the madness of a mobbed and mocked and murdered people; straining at the armposts of Thy Throne, we raise our shackled hands and charge Thee, God, by the bones of our stolen fathers, by the tears of our dead mothers, by the very blood of Thy crucified Christ: What meaneth this? Tell us the Plan; give us the Sign! . . . Whisper—speak—call, great God, for Thy silence is white terror to our hearts! The way, O God, show us the way and point us the path.

William Stanley Braithwaite, born in Boston, 1878, was largely self-educated. For years he has been nationally recognized, without regard to race, as anthologist, critic and literary authority. Beginning in 1913, he has brought out yearly a collection of magazine verse, admittedly the best series of anthologies published in America. Every first-class library has them. Braithwaite is himself the author of three volumes of poetry.

The following poem illustrates the artistry and mysticism which characterize his work:

RHAPSODY

I am glad daylong for the gift of song,
  For time and change and sorrow;
For the sunset wings and the world-end things
  Which hang on the edge of tomorrow.
I am glad for my heart whose gates apart
  Are the entrance-place of wonders,
Where dreams come in from the rush and din
  Like sheep from the rains and thunders.

George R. Margetson was an immigrant to the United States from the British West Indies in 1897. Working hard to support a large family, writing in odd moments, he has published four volumes of poetry, not especially notable, but with certain claims to originality, wit and sound philosophy.

UP FROM GEORGIA

John Wesley Holloway was born in Meriwether County, Ga., in 1865. His father, a former slave, was one of the first school teachers in Georgia. Young Holloway was educated at Clark University, Atlanta, and at Fisk; became a teacher and then a preacher. Is the author of a volume of verse entitled, "From the Desert," in which he has sought to catch and preserve certain picturesque, but passing, phases of life in the "Old South." The following is a good example of Holloway's dialect and humor:

CALLING THE DOCTOR

Ah'm sick, doctor-man, Ah'm sick!
Gi' me some'n to he'p me quick,
Don't—Ah'll die!

Tried mighty hard fo' to cure mahse'f;
Tried all dem t'ings on de pantry she'f;
Couldn't fin' not'in a-tall would do,
An' so Ah sent fo' you.

"Wha'd Ah take?" Well, le' me see:
Firs'—hoarhound drops an' catnip tea;
Den rock candy soaked in rum,
An' a good sized chunk o' camphor gum; . . .

Blue-mass, laud-num, liver pills,
"Sixty-six, fo' fever an' chills,"
Ready Relief, an' A. B. C.,
An' half a bottle of X. Y. Z.
An' sev'al mo' Ah don't recall,
Dey nevah done no good at all. . . .

So Ah got scared an' sent for you—
Now, doctor, see what you c'n do.
Ah'm sick, doctor-man. Gawd knows Ah'm sick!
Gi' me some'n to he'p me quick,
Don't—Ah'll die!

A PIONEER IN FREE VERSE

Fenton Johnson, born in Chicago, May 7, 1888, was educated in the public schools and in Chicago University. Became journalist and editor of a literary magazine. Is the author of three volumes of poetry, "A Little Dreaming" (1912), "Visions of the Dusk" (1915), and "Songs of the Soil" (1916). Was the first Negro poet to desert the conventional forms and adopt free verse, which he uses largely for the expression of disillusionment, bitterness and protest. These lines from "Tired" are typical:

I am tired of work; I am tired of building up somebody
else's civilization,
Let us take a rest, M'Lissy Jane. . . .

Throw the children into the river; civilization has given us too many. It is better to die than it is to grow up and find out that you are colored.
Pluck the stars out of the heavens. The stars mark our destiny. The stars marked my destiny.
I am tired of civilization.

Edgar Smyth Jones, eager for an education, in 1910 walked hundreds of miles from the South to Harvard University. Camped the first night on Harvard Square in Cambridge and was jailed for vagrancy. The case attracted wide attention. Jones was quickly released and the resulting interest enabled him to bring out "The Sylvan Cabin," a volume of collected verse.

Leslie Pinckney Hill was born in Lynchburg, Va., 1880; was educated in the public schools and at Harvard; taught at Tuskegee Institute; is now principal of Cheney (Pa.) Training School for Teachers. His poetic work, says James Weldon Johnson, is "quiet, restrained, scholarly; philosophical, rather than lyrical." He has published two volumes of poems, "The Wings of Oppression" (1921), and "Toussaint L'Ouverture" (1928). The following quotation well illustrates both his style and his spirit:

THE TEACHER

Lord, who am I to teach the way
To little children day by day,
So prone myself to go astray?

I teach them KNOWLEDGE, but I know
How faint they flicker and how low
The candles of my knowledge glow.

I teach them POWER to will and do,
But only now to learn anew
My own great weakness through and through.

I teach them LOVE for all mankind
And all God's creatures, but I find
My love comes lagging far behind.

Lord, if their guide I still must be,
Oh, let the little children see
The teacher leaning hard on Thee.

Alex Rogers was born in Nashville, Tenn., 1876; writer of words to popular songs and musical comedies. Composed the lyrics for most of the songs featured by Williams and Walker. Later did similar work in connection with a number of Broadway plays.

Waverly Turner Carmichael, of Snow Hill, Ala., was educated at Snow Hill Institute and Harvard University. During the World War served in France with the 367th Regiment, "The Buffaloes." Has published one thin volume of verse, chiefly dialect.

Alice Dunbar Nelson, widow of Paul Laurence Dunbar, born in New Orleans, was educated in the public schools, Straight College, Cornell, Columbia, and the University of Pennsylvania. Teacher, lecturer and journalist. Is the author of three volumes of prose and of many uncollected poems. Her most frequently quoted poem is the following:

SONNET

I had no thought of violets of late,
The wild, shy kind that spring beneath your feet
In wistful April days, when lovers mate
And wander through the fields in raptures sweet.
The thought of violets meant florists' shops,
And bows and pins, and perfumed papers fine;
And garish lights, and mincing little fops
And cabarets and songs, and deadening wine.
So far from sweet real things my thoughts had strayed,
I had forgot wide fields, and clear brown streams;
The perfect loveliness that God has made,—
Wild violets shy and Heaven-mounting dreams.
And now—unwittingly, you've made me dream
Of violets, and my soul's forgotten gleam.

A VOICE OF PROTEST

Claude McKay was born in Jamaica, British West Indies, 1890, and published a volume of verse before coming to America. Entered Tuskegee Institute at twenty-two. Spent two years at Kansas State College, then went to Harlem, New York, where he made his living as waiter, porter, houseman and dock-worker, writing all the while. Became a contributor to a number of magazines. Brought out a volume of poems in London in 1920, and published "Harlem Shadows" in this country in 1922. He has spent most of his later years in Europe. McKay is a "poet of rebellion," the spokesman of the protesting post-war group. The following sonnet was his reaction to the succession of race riots in the summer of 1919.*

IF WE MUST DIE

If we must die—let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While 'round us bark the mad and hungry dogs,
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die—oh, let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
Oh, Kinsmen! We must meet the common foe;
Though far outnumbered, let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

That McKay's poetry is not all protest is seen from the following:

LIKE A STRONG TREE

Like a strong tree that reaches down, deep, deep,
For sunken water, fluid underground,
Where the great-ringed unsightly blind worms creep,
And queer things of the nether world abound,
So would I live in rich imperial growth,
Touching the surface and the depths of things,
Instinctively responsive unto both.

* From "Harlem Shadows," by permission of the publishers, Harcourt, Brace & Co.

SONGS OF THE HEART

Georgia Douglas Johnson, a native of Atlanta, a product of its public schools and of Atlanta University, "was the first colored woman after Frances Harper to gain general recognition as a poet. . . . Her poems are songs of the heart written to appeal to the heart."* An enthusiastic critic credits her first volume, "The Heart of a Woman" (1918), with "exquisite artistry and infallible poetic content," "perfect lyrical notes and poignant pathos." Two other volumes, "Bronze" (1922), and "An Autumn Love Cycle" (1928), have since appeared. The quotations below are typical of the note of pathos that runs through her work:

THE HEART OF A WOMAN

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,
As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,
Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
And enters some alien cage in its plight,
And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars,
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.

MY LITTLE DREAMS

I'm folding up my little dreams
  Within my heart tonight,
And praying I may soon forget
  The torture of their sight.

For Time's deft fingers scroll my brow
  With fell relentless art—
I'm folding up my little dreams
  Tonight, within my heart!

LET ME NOT HATE

Let me not hate, although the bruising world decries my peace,
Gives me no quarter, hounds me while I sleep,
Would snuff the candles of my soul and sear my inmost dreamings.

Let me not hate, though girt by vipers, green and hissing through
  the dark;
I fain must love. God help me keep the altar-gleams that flicker
  clear, anon,
On down the world's grim night!

"SWIFT TO ITS CLOSE"

Joseph S. Cotter, Jr., born in Louisville, 1895; was a precocious child and had the advantage of his father's library. Entered Fisk University, but soon developed tuberculosis and had to leave. Most of his work was done during the six years of illness which ended fatally in 1919, in the twenty-third year of his age. His one little volume, "The Band of Gideon," is a contribution of genuine poetry. Here is the poet's prayer:

A PRAYER

As I lie in bed,
Flat on my back;
There passes across my ceiling

* Johnson, "The Book of American Negro Poetry."

An endless panorama of things—
Quick steps of gay-voiced children,
Adolescence in its wondering silences,
Maid and man on moonlit summer's eve,
Women in the holy glow of Motherhood,
Old men gazing silently through the twilight
Into the beyond.
O God, give me words to make my dream-children live.

These lines were probably written near the hopeless end of the poet's six-year struggle for life:

SUPPLICATION

I am so tired and weary,
  So tired of the endless fight,
So weary of waiting the dawn
  And finding endless night,

That I ask but rest and quiet—
  Rest for days that are gone,
And quiet for the little space
  That I must journey on.

Here is the poet's puzzled questioning:

IS IT BECAUSE I AM BLACK?

Why do men smile when I speak,
And call my speech
The whimperings of a babe
That cries but knows not what it wants?
Is it because I am black?

Why do men sneer when I arise
And stand in their councils,
And look them eye to eye,
And speak their tongue?
Is it because I am black?

Here, his gentle challenge to his brothers of another race:

AND WHAT SHALL YOU SAY?

Brother, come!
And let us go unto our God.
And when we stand before Him
I shall say—
"Lord, I do not hate,
I am hated.
I scourge no one,
I am scourged.
I covet no lands,
My lands are coveted.
I mock no peoples,
My people are mocked."
And, brother, what shall you say?

Charles Bertram Johnson, born at Callao, Mo., 1880; was educated at Western College, Lincoln Institute and Chicago University. Teacher and preacher. Author of two pamphlets and a book of verse: "Wind Whisperings" (1900), "The Mantle of Dunbar," and "Songs of My People" (1918). Of his race he wrote:

We have fashioned laughter
Out of tears and pain,
But the moment after—
Pain and tears again.

And this:

My people laugh and sing
And dance to death—
None imagining
The heartbreak under breath.

Joshua Henry Jones, native of Orangeburg, S. C., and graduate of Brown University. Worked on the Boston Advertiser and other New England newspapers. Four years secretary to Mayor James M. Curley of Boston. Author of two volumes of verse, "The Heart of the World" and "Poems of the Four Seas."

Otto Leland Bohanan, of Washington, D. C., has published no collection of verse, but his poems have appeared in many periodicals. He is included here for the sake of his one gem of human understanding:

THE WASHER-WOMAN

A great swart cheek and the gleam of tears,
The flutter of hopes and the shadow of fears,
And all day long the rub and scrub
With only a breath betwixt tub and tub.
Fool! Thou hast toiled for fifty years
And what hast thou now but thy dusty tears?
In silence she rubbed . . . But her face I had seen,
Where the light of her soul fell shining and clean.

Jessie Redmond Fauset, born in Snow Hill, N. J.; Philadelphia public schools; Cornell, A.B. and Phi Beta Kappa; University of Pennsylvania, A.M. Traveled abroad. Teacher of French in public schools of Washington and New York. Author of two novels and a number of uncollected poems.

Lucian B. Watkins, born at Chesterfield, Va., 1879; educated in the local public schools and Virginia State College for Negroes. Served overseas in the World War; lost his health and died in 1921. Author of "Voices of Solitude."

Ray G. Dandridge, born in Cincinnati, 1882; educated in public schools. Paralyzed at thirty and wrote most of his poems in bed. Published two volumes, "The Poet" (1920), and "Zalka Peetruza" (1928).

Anne Spencer, born Bramwell, W. Va., 1882; educated at Virginia Seminary, Lynchburg. Now a resident of the latter city. Her writings, though not voluminous, manifest real poetic ability. Five lines of her work must suffice:

DUNBAR

Ah, how poets sing and die!
Make one song and Heaven takes it;
Have one heart and Beauty breaks it;
Chatterton, Shelley, Keats and I—
Ah, how poets sing and die!

Frank Horne, born New York City, 1899; educated in public schools and City College; won varsity letters as sprinter on track team. Now teaching and coaching at High and Industrial School, Fort Valley, Ga. The following, addressed to a member of his track team, is too good to be passed:

TO JAMES

Live
As I have taught you
To run, Boy—
It's a short dash;
Dig your starting holes
Deep and firm;
Lurch out of them
Into the straightaway
With all the power
That is in you;
Look straight ahead
To the finish line;
Think only of the goal.
Run straight;
Run high;
Run hard;
Save nothing—
And finish
With an ecstatic burst
That carries you
Hurtling
Through the tape
To victory. . . .

Mary Lee Newsome, born Philadelphia, 1885; daughter of Bishop B. F. Lee; wife of Rev. Henry N. Newsome. "A lover of the out-of-doors and of the beautiful."* Let these simple, homey verses speak for her:

THE QUILT

I have the greatest fun at night,
When casement windows are all bright.
I make believe each one's a square
Of some great quilt up in the air.

The blocks of gold have black between,
Wherever only night is seen.
It surely makes a mammoth quilt—
With bits of dark and checks of gilt—
To cover up the tired day
In such a cozy sort of way.

QUOITS

In wintertime I have such fun
  When I play quoits with father.
I beat him almost every game.
  He never seems to bother.

He looks at mother and just smiles.
  All this seems strange to me,
For when he plays with grown-up folks,
  He beats them easily.

* Countee Cullen, "Carolling Dusk."

Sterling A. Brown, born in Washington, D. C., May 1, 1901; educated in city schools, Williams College (A.B. and Phi Beta Kappa), Harvard University (A.M.). Has taught literature in various colleges; now with Howard University. His most distinctive poetry is in the picturesque lore and language of the Negro roustabout of the open road. Here, for example, are a few stanzas from

LONG GONE

I laks yo' kin' of lovin',
  Ain't never caught you wrong,
But it jes' ain' nachal
  Fo' to stay here long;

An' I knows de time's a nearin'
  When I got to ride,
Though it's homelike and happy
  At yo' side.

I is got to see some people
  I ain't never seen,
Gotta highball th'u some country
  Whah I never been. . . .

I don't know which way I'm travelin'—
  Far or near,
All I knows fo' certain is
  I cain't stay here.

Ain't no call at all, sweet woman,
  Fo' to carry on,—
Jes' my name and jes' my habit
  To be Long Gone. . . .

Gwendolyn B. Bennett, born in Giddings, Texas, July 8, 1902; educated in the public schools and the fine arts department of Columbia Teachers' College. Taught art at Howard University, then studied in France. Now back as a teacher at Howard. Here is a new note of pride of race:

TO A DARK GIRL

I love you for your brownness
  And the rounded darkness of your breast.
I love you for the breaking sadness in your voice
  And shadows where your wayward eye-lids rest.

Something of old, forgotten queens
  Lurks in the lithe abandon of your walk,
And something of the shackled slave
  Sobs in the rhythm of your talk.

Oh, little brown girl, born for sorrow's mate,
  Keep all you have of queenliness,
Forgetting that you were once a slave,
  And let your full lips laugh at Fate!

Jonathan H. Brooks, the son of a poor tenant farmer, was born near Lexington, Miss., in 1904. At fourteen his mother sent him to a high school in Jackson, having saved money enough to keep him there four months. There his literary promise was recognized by a prize in a story contest. Then the money failed and it was three years before he could

go on with his high school education, which he completed at the age of twenty-one. Following this he graduated from Tougaloo College at Jackson, Miss., and is now a minister. His poems have appeared in many papers, but no collection has been published. "The Resurrection," which is quoted below, is probably his best.

THE RESURRECTION

His friends went off and left him dead
In Joseph's subterranean bed,
Embalmed with myrrh and sweet aloes
And wrapped in snow-white burial clothes.

Then shrewd men came and set a seal
Upon his grave, lest thieves should steal
His lifeless form away and claim
For him an undeserving fame.

"There is no use," the soldiers said,
"Of standing sentries by the dead."
Wherefore they threw their cloaks around
Themselves and fell upon the ground
And slept like dead men all night through
In the pale moonlight and chilling dew.

A muffled whiff of sudden breath
Ruffled the passive air of death.

He woke and raised himself in bed;
Recalled him he was crucified;
Touched both hands' fingers to his head,
And lightly felt his fresh-healed side.
Then with a deep triumphant sigh
He coolly put his graveclothes by,
Folded the sweet white winding sheet,
The toweling, the linen bands,
The napkin, all with careful hands,
And left the borrowed chamber neat.

His steps were like the breaking day;
So soft across the watch he stole
He did not wake a single soul
Or spill one dewdrop by the way.

Now Calvary was loveliness;
Lilies that flowered thereupon
Pulled off the white moon's pallid dress
And put the morning's vesture on.

"Why seek the living among the dead?
He is not here," the angel said.
The early winds took up the words
And bore them to the lilting birds,
The leafing trees, and everything
That breathed the living breath of spring.

A SINGER OF "THE BLUES"

Langston Hughes, born in Joplin, Mo., February, 1902; Cleveland public schools and Columbia University; extensive travel in Europe and Africa. Is known chiefly for his book, "The Weary Blues," and for the unconventionality of his work in thought and style. Three selections follow:

MINSTREL MAN

Because my mouth is wide with laughter
And my throat is deep with song,
You do not think I suffer, after
I have held my pain so long.

Because my mouth is wide with laughter,
You do not hear my inner cry:
Because my feet are gay with dancing
You do not know I die.

MOTHER TO SON

Well, son, I'll tell you:
Life for me ain't been no crystal stair.
It's had tacks in it,
And splinters,
And boards torn up,
And places with no carpet on the floor—
Bare.

But all the time
I'se been a-climbin' on,
And reachin' landin's,
And turnin' corners
And sometimes goin' in the dark
Where there ain't been no light.
So, boy, don't you turn back.
Don't you set down on the steps
'Cause you find it's kinder hard.
Don't you fall now—
For I'se still goin', honey,
I'se still climbin'
And life for me ain't been no crystal stair.

I, TOO

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the kitchen
When company comes;
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

COUNTEE CULLEN

Countee Cullen, one of the last and best known Negro poets, was born in New York City, May 30, 1903, the son of a Methodist preacher. He was educated in the public schools, in New York University (A.B. and Phi Beta Kappa, 1925), and in Harvard (A.M., 1926). In 1923 and again in 1924 he won second prize, and in 1925, first prize, in the Witter Bynner undergraduate poetry contest open to all the colleges of America and participated in by 700 students representing 300 colleges. At twenty-two he published "Color," a volume of verse that brought him wide recognition. This was followed shortly by a second volume entitled "Copper Sun." Cullen is essentially a lyric poet, following the classic models. His technique is faultless and his work witty, epigrammatic, intellectual and richly imaginative. A few quotations follow:*

* Quotations are from "Color," by permission of the publishers, Harper & Brothers.

A BROWN GIRL DEAD

With two white roses on her breasts,
White candles at head and feet,
Dark Madonna of the grave she rests;
Lord Death has found her sweet.

Her mother pawned her wedding ring
To lay her out in white;
She'd be so proud she'd dance and sing
To see herself tonight.

Here are three striking stanzas from the introduction to his first book, "Color":

TO YOU WHO READ MY BOOK

When the hawks of death
Tear at my throat
Till song and breath
Ebb note by note,
Turn to this book
Of the mellow word
For a singing look
At the stricken bird.

When the dreadful Ax
Rives me apart,
When the sharp wedge cracks
My arid heart,
Turn to this book
Of the singing me
For a springtime look
At the wintry tree.

Say, "Thus it was weighed
With flower and fruit,
Ere the Ax was laid
Unto its root.
Though the blows fall free
On a gnarled trunk now,
Once he was a tree
With a blossomy bough."

YET DO I MARVEL

I doubt not God is good, well-meaning, kind,
And did He stoop to quibble could tell why
The little buried mole continues blind,
Why flesh that mirrors Him must some day die, . . .

Yet do I marvel at this curious thing:
To make a poet black, and bid him sing!

INCIDENT

Once riding in old Baltimore,
Heart-filled, head-filled with glee,
I saw a Baltimorean
Keep looking straight at me.

Now I was eight and very small,
And he was no whit bigger,

And so I smiled, but he poked out
His tongue and called me "Nigger."

I saw the whole of Baltimore
From May until December:
Of all the things that happened there
That's all that I remember.

Epitaph

FOR A LADY I KNOW

She even thinks that up in heaven
Her class lies late and snores,
While poor black cherubs rise at seven
To do celestial chores.

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

James Weldon Johnson is a native of Jacksonville, Fla., graduated from Atlanta University with the degree of A.M.; did three years' graduate work at Columbia University; has honorary degree of Doctor of Literature from Talladega College and Howard University. Was several years principal of a high school in Jacksonville; then was admitted to the bar and practiced law there. Went to New York to collaborate with his brother, J. Rosamond Johnson, in writing for the light opera stage. Served consulates in Venezuela and Nicaragua. Fourteen years secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Now professor of literature in Fisk University.

James Weldon Johnson is perhaps the most prolific of the Negro writers. He is the author of "Fifty Years and Other Poems"; "God's Trombones," a remarkable poetic transcription of typical Negro sermons; "The Book of American Negro Spirituals" (two volumes); "The Book of American Negro Poetry," the most complete anthology in this field; and quite lately "Along This Way," an autobiography that has attracted wide and favorable attention. His poetic work is unusually mature and some of it ranks with the best in contemporary literature without regard to race. In the opinion of this writer, his *"Creation,"* from "God's Trombones,"* is a truly great poem that will live, noble in concept and nobly expressed. In the beginning the poem pictures God as "stepping out on space" while

Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

There, all by himself, God says, "I'm lonely; I'll make me a world." So, step by step, he makes the world, and clothes it with beauty, and peoples it with all the lower forms of life. Then looking on it all, he sadly says: "That's good, but I'm lonely still." Thence the poem hurries to its dramatic climax:

Then God sat down
On the side of a hill where He could think;
By a deep, wide river He sat down;

* The Viking Press, New York.

With His head in His hands,
God thought and thought,
Till He thought, "I'll make me a man!"

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled Him down;
And there the great God Almighty,
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of His hand;
This great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby,
Kneeled down in the dust,
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till He shaped it in His own image;
Then into it He blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul.
Amen. Amen.

What a picture! A lonely God, seeking companionship; a father-hearted God, hungry for the love of children! And so the world, with all its living things, and man himself in the image of the Father!

Another of his poems memorializes the *"Black and Unknown Bards,"* who in the days of slavery developed the Negro spirituals. A few stanzas are quoted:

BLACK AND UNKNOWN BARDS

O black and unknown bards of long ago,
How came your lips to touch the sacred fire?
How, in your darkness, did you come to know
The power and beauty of the minstrel's lyre?

. . . . .

Heart of what slave poured out such melody
As "Steal Away to Jesus"? On its strains
His spirit must have nightly floated free,
Though still about his hands he felt his chains.
Who heard great "Jordan roll"? Whose starward eye
Saw chariot "swing low"? And who was he
That breathed that comforting, melodic sigh,
"Nobody knows de trouble I see"?

What merely living clod, what captive thing,
Could up toward God through all its darkness grope,
And find within its deadened heart to sing
These songs of sorrow, love and faith, and hope?

O black slave singers, gone, forgot, unfamed,
You—you alone, of all the long, long line
Of those who've sung untaught, unknown, unnamed,
Have stretched out upward, seeking the divine.

You sang far better than you knew; the songs
That for your listeners' hungry hearts sufficed
Still live,—but more than this to you belongs:
You sang a race from wood and stone to Christ.

In the following challenge to his native country Johnson voices the question which 12,000,000 Negroes are asking:

TO AMERICA

How would you have us—as we are,
Or sinking 'neath the load we bear?
Our eyes fixed forward on a star?
Or gazing empty at despair?

Rising or falling? Men or things?
With dragging pace, or footsteps fleet,
Strong, willing sinews in your wings?
Or tightening chains about your feet?

Perhaps there could be no more fitting conclusion to this brief survey than the following hymn composed by James Weldon Johnson, set to music by his brother and now familiar to millions of Negroes, particularly students, as the National Negro Anthem:

LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea;
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun
Of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won.

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;
Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path thro' the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of our bright star is cast.

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the light,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray,
Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest, our hearts drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God, true to our Native Land.

THE NEGRO SPIRITUAL

By Frederick Hall, Director of Music, Dillard University, New Orleans

[Prof. Hall is an alumnus of Columbia and Chicago Universities, and is now (June, 1934), in the midst of a two-year study of folk music in England and Wales, on the continent of Europe, and in Africa.]

The Spiritual had its beginning in the heart of the Negro as he labored in the fields of the South. These songs are outbursts of religious fervor and in many cases are influenced by conditions which surrounded the people in whose minds they were born.

They are called Spirituals, Jubilees, Melodies, Folk Songs. Either name is correct. They are called Jubilees because of the ray of hope that is expressed in each. Regardless of how sad the song might be, or how miserable the conditions surrounding its birth, there is always found in it a definite pointing to a great day of Jubilee when all sadness will be turned into gladness. They are called Spirituals because of the deep religious feeling they express. They are called Melodies because of the striking melody built upon a scale that was originated by the slaves. When a new song was born it usually began with a new melody hummed by one person. After the tune was caught, the whole group or congregation would join in, increasing the strength of the melody and adding harmony. These songs are called Folk Songs because they satisfy the scientific definition of Folk Song, which definition is too well known to mention here.

The Negro Spirituals express a sympathy of feeling between words and music not always found even in the compositions of learned musicians. For instance, the originators of these songs would never have taken words such as "Nobody Knows De Trouble I See" and set them to a happy tune like "Every Time I Feel the Spirit." In every instance words and music harmonize; and herein lies real artistry.

Some of these songs are sad and some are happier. This is true because of the difference in living conditions of the people who originated them. In different sections there are different interpretations, different words and slightly varying melodies of songs that originally were the same. This is true because at first the songs were not written down, but were carried from place to place in the minds of the Negroes, and very frequently a new condition caused a slight change of the song.

These songs are deeply religious and should not be sung in such a way as to cause laughter or ridicule. Instrumental accompaniment always spoils the effect of the songs, and sometimes robs them of their identity.

The Spirituals show the character of the people in whose hearts they originated. Though composed in the days of slavery as expressions of the heartache of servitude and the longing for freedom, they reveal no trace of bitterness or revenge, but only the virtues of faith, hope and love. Perhaps it is this fact that gives the Spirituals the soul-stirring power that has made them popular around the world.

THE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION AND RACE RELATIONS

The Conference on Education and Race Relations is composed of a hundred Southern educators who for several years have felt profoundly the need of a sound educational approach to the South's peculiar problems of race relations.

Since preparation for intelligent citizenship is an essential function of education, and since the most serious problems of citizenship in the South are connected with the bi-racial situation, the Conference is convinced that our schools may render the South *a vastly important service* by preparing future citizens to understand these problems and to solve them in wisdom and justice.

To that end the Conference has recommended that "units of teaching based on this problem be prepared for use in classes in American history, literature, education, civics and sociology and be made available for all the schools, colleges and universities of the South." *"Singers in the Dawn,"* a brief supplement to the study of American literature, has been prepared in response to the above suggestion. The Conference recommends it to all teachers of literature in high schools and colleges and bespeaks for it the widest possible use.

The work of the Conference on Education and Race Relations is directed by the following committees:

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